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Title:

Speech notes - opening address to the National Conference of Social Welfare students.

Subject: The power of the politician in effecting social change

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Speech notes. Opening address to the
National Conference of Social Welfare
Students. Subject : The Power of the
Politician in Effecting Social Change. 25.8.75

1. Mr. Chairman, Ladies & Gentlemen.
Thank you for inviting me here this
morning. The role of the Social Worker
is constantly expanding in our community
and thus reflects the more emphatic and
sensitive approach to people's problems
or personal needs that has developed
over the past decade or so.

2. I have been billed to speak on "The Power of the Politician in Effecting Social Change" - and the general theme of your Conference is "Love or Power".
3. The role of the politician in our kind of society is in fact determined to a large degree by 'love' if by love you mean 'Involvement' and 'relatedness' as I take it you do from the notes in the front of your programme.
4. The politician cannot effectively move in his party or in the electorate as a whole if he does not achieve or

encourage, and been seen to do so,
'involvement' and 'relatedness'.

5. Notions of 'love' and 'power' should not be seen as mutually exclusive. As social workers many of you will come across situations marked by emotional tension in which love and power are inextricably commingled - in a negative way, as with the protagonists of "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolfe" - in a positive way, with a parent endeavouring to influence a child in some necessary social value.

6. And to a certain extent, so it is with politicians. They seek 'love', that is, relatedness, to exercise power - power to change society, to do a job - or conservative power, power not to do much at all, and to maintain the status quo.
7. I and my party exercise power for change. In the last ten years we have brought about a considerable amount of change in South Australia. A catalogue of these changes would take some time to run through - but, for instance, new rights

and protections for consumers; radically improved educational facilities; public opposition to the war in Vietnam and to Apartheid in South Africa; very considerably relaxed drinking laws; large scale programmes of environmental protection; new health and hospital facilities; the implementation of effective town planning procedures; and large scale community welfare programmes and reforms. They are just a few areas in which the changes have been widespread and fundamental.

8. In fact the changes have been so

fundamental that many people, especially those, say, under twenty-five, would not credit what it was like before. Thirty-odd years of conservative government in this State had left a situation of woefully inadequate health and hospital resources, pitifully deprived schools, total inaction in town planning.

9. And one of the areas of most serious inaction was Community Welfare - people were being seriously disadvantaged and neglected. On the other hand, the conservative paternalism of the day

maintained controls over private behaviour of an extraordinarily puritanic kind. As a result, we had the narrowest, most antique licencing laws, while when the Labor Government in 1966 moved to hold a referendum to seek democratic approval from people for the holding of a State Lottery, Tom Playford, who had just lost power, said that this was tantamount to "putting poison in the hands of children".

10. So I think that to illustrate the role of the politician in effecting social

change, the best two examples are those of the Licencing Act in this State, and the radically changed situation in the Social Welfare field.

11. You know, before 1965, to get a drink after 6.00 p.m., Monday to Saturday, required a great deal of ingenuity if you didn't belong to a Club like the Adelaide Club, the Army Navy & Military Club, Commercial Travellers and the like.
12. In restaurants, at first you could only drink wine between 6.00 p.m. and 8.30 p.m. This was subsequently relaxed to 10.00 pm.

which was the only effective reform since 6 o'clock closing was imposed in 1915. (1915 could be described as a high point in South Australian puritanism.) The temperance movement allied itself with Peake Government to bring in radically restrictive hotel trading hours. One of the telling arguments used was that, by having hotels close at six, ladies would be able to wait for their trams in the evening without fear of being molested by drunken soldiery on their way to the Great War.

13. This kind of paternalism was maintained by the Liberal-Country Party and the Legislative Council until 1967. Less than ten years ago! Throughout that time, the wealthy in Adelaide really weren't affected at all. They had their clubs (and their cabarets) in which the law was from time to time discreetly broken, or even ignored. For the rest it was the six o'clock swill, the cheap brandy out of cups, and constant raids by the police in sleazy drinking spots.

14. In hotels bar standards were, by and large, deplorable. And overall, the serving of a drink was given quilt-ridden overtone.
15. When Labor was first elected in 1965 I was given the job of Attorney-General, and one of the first things I set about doing in my department was looking into the Licencing Act and liquor trading in general.
16. We established a Royal Commission to enquire into the field. (Justice Sangster).

17. Recommendations and subsequent legislation. Effective reform. An Act still being progressively refined.
18. The result is that in South Australia today we probably have the most liberal liquor laws in Australia. Anyone who has travelled in Victoria and has tried to cope with the bring-your-own-bottle restaurant system would know.
19. That is one area of social change that I as a politician was deeply involved in.
20. It was a widely desired social change.

In a sense, it was a chicken and egg situation. People wanted that change, and the Government reflected that desire in its actions.

21. But with Community Welfare and the massive reforms undertaken there, there was not the same level of community consciousness and demand. This was because our society had grown up with the notion that people in need of social services and social assistance somehow hadn't acted properly, hadn't ordered their lives effectively, hadn't worked hard enough, or hadn't saved

hard enough. It was, in a sense, a sin to be poor or, in the case of a wife, deserted. The old 19th Century notion of the poor house still remained.

22. It might be appropriate to sketch the history of Community Welfare in this State.

23. The first official activity for the social welfare of children and adults was taken soon after colonisation when the State immigration authorities cared for new arrivals and sometimes immigrants were accommodated temporarily in tents on the parklands.

24. A more permanent solution of the problems of the destitute came with the first Destitute Persons Relief Act in 1842.
25. In 1849 a Destitute Board was appointed and assumed responsibility for the welfare of both children and adults. In 1886 a State Children's Council was formed to deal with children, while the Destitute Board continued with other work. This situation continued until 1926 when The Children's Welfare and Public Relief Board was created by the Maintenance Act, 1926, to do the work

of the two previous boards. The Chairman of the new board was the permanent head of the then Children's Welfare and Public Relief Department.

26. This board was a hang-over of the old work-house situation. Public relief was seen as a charity. There was no ministerial responsibility involved in the area. A minor proportion of the State's revenue was given to it. The destitute, deserted and underprivileged were very badly done by.

27. In 1965 a new portfolio of Minister of Social Welfare was created. I was he.
28. The old Board was abolished. We had a Social Welfare Department, and a Social Welfare Advisory Council was established. On July 1, 1970, this Department was amalgamated with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to form the Department of Social Welfare and Aboriginal Affairs.
29. In 1972 the Community Welfare Act became operative. Under this, the Department became the Department of

Community Welfare with the objectives of promoting the general well-being of the community, encouraging the welfare of the family as the basis of community welfare, promoting co-ordination of services and collaboration among various agencies and promoting research, education and training in community welfare.

30. The Act provides for the establishment of community welfare centres at selected locations throughout the State and the full range of services is available from these centres. District

offices also have been established in twenty-six city and country locations.

31. Simultaneously, in the matter of the care and supervision of children, we undertook major reforms in the court system as it applied to juveniles. In 1967 the Juvenile Courts Act provided for the Children's Court to be separated out from the general criminal court structure. It was provided with new standards in flexibility and the general philosophy was changed from punitive to rehabilitative.

32. This Act has now been augmented to provide a very high degree of flexibility in the treatment of young offenders between ten and 18 years.
33. The courts are now humane places that seek not so much to punish the offender as to protect the community from him and seek ways by which he can be rehabilitated, understood, and cared for.
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35. All of these provisions and reforms constitute the effective use of power in the community - that is to say, political power properly related to the provision of services needed by the community.
36. Politicians do have a major role in effecting social change - but in our system they tend to do this by reflecting the current values and ideas of the community. When they do not, or when they do not respond to political pressures or misread social attitudes, they can be seriously

affected at the electoral level.

37. I well remember the problem I had with the Lutheran community in Murray Bridge..

38. But it is not only a matter of reading electoral opinion and operating accordingly. There is also a significant degree of leadership and sorting out of progressive attitudes involved. It is when politicians do not seek to lead, balancing that with the capacity of the community to accept proper change, that creates in society the pressures and tensions that can at

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